

Aviation Week Owners May Be Changing Course

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With little over 100,000 circulation, a jaw-breaking vocabulary and no stories about Margaret Trudeau, the trade journal called Aviation Week and Space Technology is not designed to be light reading for the mass audience.

To those not familiar with it, Av Week (as it is usually called) would have to be called obscure.

To a few who do know it, it would have to be called an enemy of the republic because of the military secrets it allegedly pours out.

But to the bulk of the technocrats, bureaucrats and businessmen who read it, it is something else again. It is one of the main means by which the members of the military-industrial-governmental complex persuade and pressure each other. The aerospace business would have to invent an Av Week if Editor-Publisher Robert Hotz wasn't supplying them with it.

"It's must reading in our business," says Grumman Aerospace's Sandy Jones. "Anything that is in the magazine is going to be in our customers' minds as quickly as it appears."

ALL OF WHICH explains why there is more than passing interest in Bob Hotz' future. A change is expected.

Hotz says he is still considering his future since retirement is not being forced on him. There are indications, however, that an agreement has already been reached between the editor-publisher and the weekly magazine's corporate parent, McGraw-Hill. Hotz will stay on in some capacity, but the betting is that when his new status is announced it won't entail day-to-day control of the magazine.

That's important because, more than any other factor, outsiders and insiders agree, Bob Hotz has shaped the magazine.

"Quite frankly, the main element in the magazine's success is Hotz," says Cecil Brownlow, long-time Av Week reporter who now runs his own string of weekly newspapers in New York.

Hotz is a stocky, robust man with waves of white hair. His own aviation credentials include time as a World War II B-25 pilot in China. Last week he turned 65.

He had agreed to retire after grooming a successor, but no longer is mandatory retirement at 65 enforceable. So Hotz began negotiation with his corporate bosses at McGraw-Hill.

"I'M CONCERNED with preserving the values of Aviation Week," Hotz said in an interview.

Chief among those values is the pursuit of new technology. "One of the reasons we have buried most of our competitors is that we have been perceptive enough to see where the trends in technology are going," says Hotz, who is anything but falsely modest about his magazine and its staff.

Another value is the old-fashioned scoop. Aviation Week is the kind of product that might result if the old newspaper play "Front Page" were rewritten by the students at engineering schools.

"The scoop is important because we have to tell readers about things before they find out about it elsewhere," Hotz says.

Often, in fact very often, Hotz' staff succeeds in being first.

To do it, Hotz develops reporters. His chief military reporter currently is a tenacious retired Marine, Clarence "Robby" Robinson, whose haircut, if not his waistline, could still pass muster in the corps.

Robinson, with the backing of Hotz, made a national issue out of the controversial proposition that the Soviet Union is working hell bent on a beam of charged particles that could knock missiles from the sky.

ROBINSON'S CRITICS tend to fault him for an indiscriminate appetite for facts in his reporting.

If that means that Robinson finds things out, Hotz agrees. "He's a natural force," said the publisher. "He can get three lead stories on the way to the can."

It isn't the magazine's claim to scoops that comes under challenge. Nor is it the whole-souled devotion to technology and free enterprise. What is controversial about the publication is its policy on classified material and its accuracy.

"Aviation Week is wholly profigate in the way it publishes what it lays its hands on," charges one Senate staff member. "There is some information that really should be kept secret."

Another Senate aide says, "Their main disservice to national security is in the technical details they publish. At the same time, this aide says he finds it useful to have the magazine flush such material out into the open so it can be used publicly on Capitol Hill."

Hotz flatly rejects such criticism. "A secret is somebody's perception," he says. "A lot of people who do the bitching are low level. Most of the people we deal with are people at a policy level who make the declassification decision during the interview."

HOTZ HAS NO patience with the qualms of what he calls "security clerks" in the government. He says the magazine will hold — and has held — material if it affects "real security." But, he goes on, "It's still our judgment."

The magazine in this regard is closer to the Pentagon than most others. Some material is submitted to the services before it is published to make sure it contains no breaches of what Hotz and the military deem "real security."

An example usually cited of a story that the magazine held to its later chagrin involves the triple-sonic, high-altitude spy plane now called the SR-71. Hotz says the magazine kept the secret for a year and a half only to have President Lyndon B. Johnson disclose its existence to live up a dull press conference.

On the question of accuracy, opinions are also divergent. One harsh critic of the magazine goes so far as to say the damage done by its publication of classified material is mitigated by the fact that "50 percent of

Others in a position to know challenge the severity of that assertion.

ONE CIVILIAN scientist
positioned in government to make a
qualified judgment on the maga-
zine's accuracy, says it has a much
better batting average.

"Frequently, they are very, very
good, just right on the mark," says
this official. That makes it all the
more noticeable, this official goes
on, when "they are surprisingly
bad."

Controversy surrounds Hotz in-
side as well as outside the company.
He has what insiders say is continu-
ing trouble with McGraw-Hill mid-
dle management.

Asked about this recently,
McGraw-Hill Publications President
Gordon Jones said, "Hotz reports to
God."

Jones goes on to say that "anbody
who tries to get Hotz to conform to
everything is going to run into trou-
ble. You have to manage him a little
differently. Like every really great
editor, he's very protective of his
magazine."

It was Gordon Jones who made
Hotz a reluctant publisher 2½ years
ago. Since then, "From a business
point of view, this magazine has
broken every record," Jones says.
"The bottom line at Aviation Week is
at a historic high."

No announcement on Hotz' future
is likely until after the conclusion at
mid-month of the Paris Air Show,
which is to aviation what the
Cannes Film Festival is to movies,
and more, it's Bob Hotz' kind of
event.

He recently invited a friend to at-
tend with him, saying, typically,
"There's no way to see that thing un-
less you go with me."